

FOUR CASES OF PARANOIA APPEARING IN FOUR SUCCESSIVE GENERATIONS.

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THE material for this article was obtained from Miss Le Blanc, the last member of the paranoiac line, and from her mother who kindly gave all desired information.

Miss Le Blanc had in her possession the letters and other documents of three generations. These papers, yellow with age and with the writing so faded as to be almost illegible, were systematically arranged in chronological order, and carefully wrapped in pieces of silk. Miss Le Blanc was very cautious about confiding in strangers; it was only after several months' acquaintance, and through her pride in their supposed importance, that she would allow these documents to be examined. To her they were very precious, for through them she hoped to establish her claim to the British throne; from which inheritance her family had for many years been kept by the machinations of their enemies. The story of this family, except the names, is given exactly as it appears in its documents. A few of the extracts, the verses and the letter of Mrs. Le Blanc are quoted verbatim.

The first letter was written in 1801, by Miss Le Blanc's great-grandfather, to the daughter of an English squire, urging her to elope to America. The English was imperfect, and many French words were employed. The lover lamented slightly his lack of wealth and rank, considering that of minor importance in comparison with his great talents as an artist. His egotism, selfishness; his want of principle and utter disregard of consequences appeared in every line. He even hinted that, if his sweetheart could bring a little of her father's money

with her, it would facilitate matters. He writes that he hears her voice in the winds and sees her face in the clouds. Whether this statement is simply a lover's rhapsody, or due to auditory and visual hallucinations, it would be difficult to decide. In his next letter he threatens to poison himself if she will not marry him.

Then comes a letter written by the old squire, and sent by an emigrant neighbor to his daughter at Jamestown, Va. He denounces her roundly for leaving her home for Le Blanc, "a daft French painter, without a sou and without brains enough to keep it if he had it."

Next, chronologically, is a little diary, written by Mrs. Le Blanc, made of pieces of coarse paper, and tied together with leather strings. The young wife writes as though her matrimonial venture had not proved a success. Her artist husband is subject to alternate periods of depression and exaltation; during the former he wanders into the forests and remains away from home for weeks at a time; while in the latter state he is full of impossible and impracticable schemes for making money.

He tells his wife of some secret enemy who continually thwarts him and prevents the success of his most carefully laid plans. Over the mantel he always keeps a loaded gun as a defense against his persecutor. His queer actions and conversation trouble her; and a suspicion as to his sanity seems to creep gradually into his wife's mind. Later he begins to have trouble in mixing his colors properly, especially the blues and greens. Mrs. Le Blanc writes of his painting a portrait in which the subject was unconsciously depicted in a green coat, while the background was filled in with blue grass and shrubs. Suspicion and distrust of those about him constantly grew upon him, and lead to frequent quarrels with his neighbors. In the most ordinary and innocent remark he sees a hidden meaning, an allusion to his secret plans, which he accordingly resents.

Under the date of 1807 is mentioned the birth of her first child, a boy, whom she names Paul. Six months after this event occurs the death of her husband "in a fit."

At intervals wider and wider apart, Mrs. Le Blanc records unimportant domestic occurrences.

The last note in her diary is made in 1829. She writes of her son Paul's fondness for music and of his skill on the violin. She expresses regret that he "is so odd and unlike the other lads." She describes him as an effeminate youth, indolent, and delighting in nothing so much as to dress in her clothing and promenade the streets to the indignation of the staid citizens of the town.

With this description of her son's character, Mrs. Le Blanc's diary ends, and the history is continued in the literary remains of Paul Le Blanc. A large bundle of letters, scraps of music and unfinished manuscripts upon musical topics, written by Paul Le Blanc, next appear.

Some of the letters are copies of those he has written to titled ladies in England, making violent protestations of love and imploring them to marry him.

Occasionally he pours forth his passion in verse. The following is a fair specimen of his poetry :

" Oh lady fair, with golden hair,
My soul to thee I speed.
I care not for fame. "What's in a name?"
Thy love is all I need.

" When thou dost smile, I think the while
That an angel's stepped from paradise.
Thy voice, so sweet, makes music meet
To drown with tears the devil's eyes.

" In sleep I seem to catch the gleam
Of thy white wings above me.
These words I hear, in cadence clear,
' Dear heart, fear not, I love thee.'

" May dreams of you, my sweet, be true,
And thy dear love forever bless me;
And this life o'er, for ever more,
To love thee and possess thee."

His amorous proclivities seem to have gotten him into trouble from time to time, for in several letters he complains of the harsh treatment he has received at the hands of the fathers and brothers of the objects of his adoration. Some of the women to whom he writes he

has never seen, and others he has seen but once or twice ; but all are evidently far above him in wealth and social position.

In one letter he writes: "My angel love, we have never met in the flesh, but before we were created in the semblance of man and woman, our souls wandered through the realms of space, listening to the music of the spheres and watching the glory of the planets. Dost thou not remember the agony of that moment when we were torn apart and made to inhabit these frail tenements of clay?"

Among the little scraps of music were some quaint, pretty airs, but others seemed incoherent, if such a term could be applied to music; one theme running into another without proper musical connection.

Under the date of 1835, there is a letter from a friend congratulating him upon his marriage with the daughter of a Virginia planter. One year after there are some verses written by Le Blanc upon the death of his wife at the birth of his son :

"O life ! O death ! Thou mysterious ones !
Whence comest thou and whither dost thou go ?
Art thou reconvertable, like steam and snow ?
Warm life congealing into the iciness of death,
Chill Mors melting under the Creator's breath
And assuming the transient vapor we call life ?"

in the habit of holding familiar converse with disembodied spirits, these questions seem superfluous.

A number of business letters written between 1837 and 1850, by orchestra leaders, indicate that he is a vacillating man, never remaining in any place but a short time, and, as a rule, proving unsatisfactory to his employers. Nearly all the letters are either in answer to his application for a position, or else informing him that his services are no longer required. It would seem that most of his difficulties arose from his inability to live amicably with his brother musicians, because of his jealousy of them, and his suspicion that they slandered him and prevented him from enjoying the deserved distinction of being the greatest violinist of the age.

The last letter of the series, written in 1856, by the manager of a New York theatre, discharges him for breaking a violin bow over the head of his orchestra leader, and advises him, for the sake of his son, Louis Le Blanc, now a young man of twenty, to go to an Insane Asylum for treatment.

The remainder of the history of this unfortunate family is given by the wife and daughter of Louis Le Blanc.

Paul Le Blanc, after a series of assaults upon different individuals, was committed to the Bloomingdale Asylum, where he died, after being, as his granddaughter expressed it, "persecuted, cheated out of his inheritance, imprisoned and hunted to his death by emissaries of Queen Victoria."

Louis Le Blanc, unlike his father and grandfather, was of a religious temperament, and had no taste for either art or music. He was a dreamer and a book-worm. Having turned his attention to theology, he joined a Methodist Conference, and went to Indiana as a circuit preacher. In 1860 he married a Boston girl who was preaching in his parish.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, he was one of the first to join the Indiana volunteers and march to the South. He served during the entire Rebellion, and returned home without having received a scratch. The excitement, the fatigue, and the deprivations incident to army life, were, however, more than his defective nervous organization could endure, and he soon began to show signs of mental dissolution.

"He was never the same after the war," his wife writes. "Previous to that, although a quiet, thoughtful man, he was always cheerful, and was a kind, affectionate husband."

After his return from the war, he became nervous, suspicious and irritable to a degree that made life a burden to me.

I know now that he inherited his insanity from his father and grandfather, but I did not know it when I married him. Neither did he know that my mother became insane while pregnant with me, and that after my birth she was taken to an asylum, where she soon died. I never thought about my mother's fate when I married

Mr. Le Blanc, any more than he thought of his father. We were both young, and life's possibilities never presented themselves to us in so serious a light.

With such a taint in the blood of both father and mother, is there any hope that my poor child can recover her reason? To have my mother, my husband, and my child die in a hospital for the insane, is sad, sad.

You write me that if you knew her father's history and her own history, previous to coming to your hospital, it might help you to understand her case, and enable you to give me some idea as to the chances for her ultimate recovery.

I will open my heart to you and keep nothing back.

Her poor father preached for a while after he came from the war, but became so excited every time he entered the pulpit, that it was thought best to have him put into an asylum where he could be treated for his infirmity.

He believed that he was inspired, and that the Holy Ghost stood at his right hand and told him what to preach. He thought that it was his mission to save the people from their sins, and when the congregation grew tired of listening to his violent and often profane upbraidings, and assisted me in getting him into an asylum, he thought that we were conspiring to kill him. As they were taking him to the carriage, he said, "What better can I expect? Thus did they persecute and crucify the One who sent me, but know you that it is in my power to call down the fire of heaven, kindled by the wrath of the Father, whom you have insulted through me, to consume you? But I spare you. Turn you from your evil ways. You put a Sodomite to the blush by your vileness. Weep, scourge your hypocritical hearts. Repent."

After six months' residence at the asylum the doctors sent him home, as they said, fully restored.

He did seem perfectly well, and commenced to preach again. During the next year my daughter was born, and a year and a half after that Mr. Le Blanc began to act strangely again.

He made queer marks on the walls of the house with charcoal. These, he said, were the writings of the Holy Ghost. He also made pictures of angels and of queer looking beasts and birds. The drawings were well done, which surprised me, as I had never known him to sketch anything. The pictures, he said, were of the heavenly visions that he saw; that the beasts were those of the

Revelations. Every figure and character had its significance, which he would explain by the hour if any one would listen to him.

At length his moral nature became affected, and he talked and acted in such an unseemly manner that the ladies of the town became afraid of him. The pictures that he now drew upon the walls were so obscene, that I was in constant terror lest the neighbors should see them.

We had to send him away again, and in two years God had mercy on him and took him home.

My daughter was never strong, and as a child the slightest shock would send her into convulsions. She was so bright that I had to keep her out of school a great deal, fearing that she would overtax her brain. She was always far ahead of those of her age, and her memory was marvellous. She was passionately fond of music and never forgot any tune she ever heard or played. I used to lock the piano several hours a day to keep her away from it. She also painted and sketched fairly well.

She was for several years so self-conscious and sensitive that she rather avoided society, and if I had not prevented it, would have lived the life of a recluse.

At length she began to take an interest in the world around her and went to the opposite extreme. She was constantly on the go, and took up every new fad that came along. Faith cure, Christian science, hypnotism, mind-reading and the Delsarte craze, each had its turn. She was extremely vacillating and never stuck to one thing long.

She opened a studio and commenced to teach painting; and, although fairly successful, she soon gave that up and advertised for music pupils. The Woman's Rights movement interested her for a time, and after hearing one woman speak upon the subject of Social Purity, she conceived the idea of becoming a public lecturer. I generally allowed her to do as she pleased, but when she went down into the slums of Boston and delivered a lecture on Social Purity to a mixed audience, I thought that the thing had gone far enough, and I put my foot down. We had a stormy scene and I was sick for a week after it, but I heard no more about lecturing.

Up to this time she had never manifested an interest in young men, but after going to the theatre one night and seeing a popular young actor, like a good many other silly women that year, she fell in love with him

and would have joined his company if I had not interfered. I began to lose my patience, and, failing to recognize the fact that she was not responsible for her foolish conduct, I scolded her severely and threatened to put her into a convent. That afternoon she left home saying that she was going to pay some calls. In about three hours after she left the house she came back in a hack, accompanied by a policeman. She was dripping wet and nearly dead from fright and exposure.

It seems that she had gone for a sail on a bay excursion boat, and when it was well out she deliberately jumped overboard. She was rescued without much difficulty, and through the intervention of friends was brought home instead of being taken to the station-house. Not caring to endure the notoriety that her reckless act had created, and hoping that a change would benefit her, I moved to this city.

She grew rapidly worse, and as I could not prevent her foolish schemes, nor control her extravagant expenditure of money, acting under the advice of a nerve specialist, I had her taken to your hospital.

The papers that you wrote me about were some that had been preserved by my husband's father, and, with his violin, were packed in an old trunk in the garret. My daughter found them, and having some romantic notion in regard to them, has carefully put them into parcels and never allows them to leave her possession.

I have never taken the trouble to read them, so cannot tell you what they are about, but if you can get on the right side of her she will let you read them. This is a long letter, and has probably wearied you, but I wanted to give you all the facts as fully and as accurately as possible. If you think best you can tell my daughter that I will be up to see her next week.

Respectfully yours,

MARY LE BLANC.

The above is a verbatim copy of a letter I received from Mrs. Le Blanc a short time ago. She seems perfectly sound mentally and physically, and although having had a great deal of trouble and anxiety, she takes a cheerful and sensible view of her misfortunes. She tells me that, as far as she knows, her mother is the only member of her family that had ever been insane.

She had reared her daughter in a more sensible man-

ner than many mothers would have done under the circumstances, but in spite of advantageous environment, careful training, and a life of comparative ease, Miss Le Blanc had succumbed to the overwhelming force of inherited neurosis. Occasionally she seems to recognize her morbid fancies as the fruit of a diseased brain, though she generally conceals her delusions, and will talk freely only with one who has gained her confidence.

She amused herself recently with sketching the other patients, but she had to give up the diversion because when she looked intently at a face it seemed to elongate and then to widen, like the alternate reflection in a convex and concave mirror. At times, her models appear to increase to gigantic stature and then to dwindle to pigmies before her eyes. She says, "I know that I am the victim of optical illusions, but it is very uncomfortable, nevertheless."

She is also governed by morbid impulses. An irresistible power forces her, as soon as she rises in the morning, to step on certain figures in the carpet. In handing an article to any one she will sometimes draw it back again, because "the force within" compels her to do so. She often makes a desperate effort to restrain her morbid impulses, but the fight against them seems to exhaust her.

In a burst of confidence she once told me that, several weeks previous, she had had a strong desire to kill me, not that she did not like me or that I had ever harmed her, "but a something within her," as she expressed it, said, "kill the doctor, steal a knife and kill her." She caused her nurse to lock her in her room at the hours at which I made my rounds, and she refused to see me or talk to me through the closed door. I remembered the circumstance, but I had not the least idea of the reason for her avoidance.

She had always been most pleasant and courteous in her treatment of me, and although I knew that she had auditory hallucinations and was a victim of morbid impulse, I did not think that she had yet developed homi-

cidal tendencies. She stayed in her room for a week, and at the end of that time she came to me and said that the fight was over and that she was victorious. I congratulated her on her victory, little dreaming how much that victory had meant to me.

She is a devout believer in telepathy, and complains of the evil and vulgar thoughts that people make her think. All her plans and aspirations are based upon the idea that she will one day rule Great Britain.

Some of her plans for benefitting and elevating the lower classes are quite sensible, while others are extremely Utopian.

She has designed a school in which the pupils shall receive such religious and moral training as will lead to the abolition of legislation. "Conscience and the love of right will be developed in my people to such an extent that crime will be an impossibility." As she cannot hope to raise the fathers of her pupils to this lofty standard, she is going to inaugurate her reform by enacting a law compelling employers to divide all earnings above a certain per cent. with their workmen. She takes an interest in the great questions of the day, and weaves them into the web of her future empire.

To the superficial observer there is nothing about Miss Le Blanc to suggest mental alienation. Her face indicates an intelligence rather above the average, and her manner at all times is pleasant and lady-like. Owing to the arrangement of her hair, her cranial asymmetry is not noticeable. There is, however, a marked bulging in the left parietal region, the eminence being as prominent as that observed in some old cases of hydrocephalus. The right parietal bone is flattened. Extending from the upper border of the occipital protuberance to the occipito-parietal articulation, is a depression measuring one-eighth of an inch in depth and two and a half inches laterally. There is no history of an instrumental delivery or of any subsequent injury.

The circumferential measurement of Miss Le Blanc's head is that of about the average woman,—twenty-one

and a quarter inches. From the left external auditory meatus over the vertex to the same point on the right she measures thirteen and one-third inches.

Her occipito-mental or "paranoiac measurement," taken from the point of the chin over the right side of the face and head to the occipital protuberance and back on the left side of head and face to the chin is twenty-six inches, the longest I have ever found, though I have measured the heads of over fifteen hundred women, both sane and insane. She has no deformity of the eyes, ears, nose or mouth, and her general physique is fully up to the average.

Her delusions of persecution are not yet well developed. She thinks that every one misunderstands her and her motives, and through their lack of comprehension, ill-treat her. She hopes that friends will one day see in her the "signs of royal descent," and will assist her in obtaining possession of her throne.

At the present time she is gentle and tractable, but what her future will be, when her "subjects" still fail to appreciate her and recognize her royal prerogatives, it does not take much of a prophet to predict.